

Eternity Daily Bible Study

(A ministry of Eternity Christian Fellowship)

Walking In The Spirit - 76

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Topic: Mustard-Seed Ministry

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There are five references to 'mustard-seeds' in the Bible, in two contexts. One referring to the Kingdom of God, and the other to our faith:

Kingdom of God

Matthew 13:31-32 MKJV *He put out another parable to them, saying, The kingdom of Heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; (32) which indeed is the least of all seeds, but when it is grown it is the greatest among herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in its branches.*

Mark 4:30-32 ESV *And he said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? (31) It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, (32) yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."*

Luke 13:18-19 ESV *He said therefore, "What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? (19) It is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his garden, and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches."*

Faith

Matthew 17:20 MKJV *And Jesus said to them, Because of your unbelief. For truly I say to you, If you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, Move from here to there. And it shall move. And nothing shall be impossible to you.*

Luke 17:6 ESV *And the Lord said, "If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."*

Yellow mustard seed is extremely small and fine, almost like flour. It is sold online at "100 mesh and up". Which means the largest particle is 149 microns in diameter which is approximately 0.006 inches. This is around twice the thickness of a human hair. Black mustard seed is larger, about the size of the head of a pin. The resulting shrub can grow 12 to 15 feet high (4-5 meters).

In ancient Jewish thought the mustard seed was the smallest thing that had any real existence. It was, in some ways, their idea of the 'atom' or basic particle size. The mustard seed was also seen as a symbol of the humble ego. The thing that did not boast of itself.

The Roman historian Pliny describes the ancient mustard plant: *With its pungent taste and fiery effect, mustard is extremely beneficial for the health. It grows entirely wild, though it is improved by being transplanted: but on the other hand, when it has once been sown, it is scarcely possible to get the place free of it, as the seed when it falls germinates at once.* (Pliny, "Natural History" 19.170-171)

Later (around 200 AD) the Mishnah forbade the planting of mustard seeds in domestic gardens because the tiny seeds would be spread everywhere by the wind (including the neighbor's yard) and the seeds would 'germinate at once' (in 3-10 days in cold moist soil) in turn producing a new mustard plant which would repeat the process until it was totally out of control like a noxious weed.

The Kingdom metaphors are obvious: small beginnings, becomes large, spreads everywhere, out of control, impossible to eradicate, blown by the wind of the Spirit, immediate propagation, 3 days in the earth (grave) before new life, fiery, pungent, cleansing, healing.

A mustard-seed ministry starts small and is full of faith and of the life of God so that it rapidly propagates in bible studies, small cell groups, house churches and is 'blown by the wind of the Spirit' to start in new places and spread new life there as well. Soon these small bible studies become churches on their own so that people can come and be at home there and they can be places of spiritual rest.

Mustard-seed ministry is fiery and holy and pungent and healing. It brings the gifts and the power of the Spirit to bear. It moves mountains and uproots the established order of evil and oppression and casts it into the sea.

Mustard-seed ministry is always counter-cultural to some extent. It is the outbreak of the Kingdom of God amongst the kingdoms of this world. It upsets the principalities and powers of wickedness that seek to control the governments, religions, media and business operations of this world.

The mustard-seed is small and humble and planted in the earth, the very opposite of the boastful self-exalting sin of the Devil who sought to set his throne 'above the most High' (Isaiah 14:13,14). Yet this radical humility brings great vitality and fruitfulness and in the end the mustard-seed becomes a substantial sized tree. The seed does not remain small forever. The idea is to get as many saved as possible. So God scatters many mustard-seeds, blown by the wind, and makes each into a large tree.

The tree with the 'birds of the air' nesting in it is used as an image of human empires in Ezekiel 31:3-6 (where it refers to Assyria) and Daniel 4:12 (where it refers to Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon). In both cases the birds of the air are the people of the many lands that are conquered. In Ezekiel 17:23 the twig that becomes a great tree is the Messiah and the great tree is the Kingdom of God.

Ezekiel 17:22-24 ESV *Thus says the Lord GOD: "I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and will set it out. I will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. (23) On the mountain height of Israel will I plant it, that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar. And under it will dwell every kind of bird; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest. (24) And all the trees of the field shall know that I am the LORD; I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it."*

My interpretation of this is that Ezekiel 17 refers to the Kingdom of God as a whole. This shall be massive and will defeat great empires such as Assyria and Babylon. In the end the Kingdom of God will be the 'stone cut without hands' that shatters the kingdoms of this world (Daniel 2). Within the Kingdom of God as a whole are many different mustard-seed ministries which are planted by the Holy Spirit. These can be in all stages of growth from just germinating bible studies to well established churches.

The common thing about all these mustard-seed ministries is that they have 'mustard-seed faith'. They do not move in the flesh. Instead they rely on the word of God and prayer. They see themselves firstly as spiritual organizations with a spiritual inner dynamic. They may need to consult architects, engineers, accountants and lawyers but they are not controlled by them in the same way as a human corporation would be.

Their leader is God, first and foremost and while there is leadership, and it is respected and financially supported, they do not look to any man or woman as a mediator between them and God. Their eyes are on Christ.

The mustard-seed analogy is very potent as we approach the End Times. We need to quickly propagate the gospel if the task is to be achieved. We cannot (metaphorically) wait for tiny acorns to turn into mighty oaks which then take 20 to 70 years to produce the first acorns of their own. That is the institutional model and it won't evangelize the world in time. We need to spread the gospel like a holy weed that plants itself everywhere and which cannot be eradicated. This will come about as we develop explosive faith, spiritual sensitivity to God's timing and methods and boldness in proclamation.

Blessings,

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